

## News from Congressman

# Chet Edwards

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### **Edwards: War Funding Bill Supports U.S. Combat Troops & Veterans, and Tells Iraqi Politicians to Take More Responsibility for Nation's Future**

(Washington, D.C.) –U.S. Representative Chet Edwards today supported House passage of the \$124 billion emergency war funding bill that gives the president and military commanders the flexibility and funds they need to carry out the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill provides \$95.5 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, \$4 billion more than President Bush requested.

“This bill fully funds our U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, improves health care for our combat wounded troops and veterans and sends a message to Iraqi political leaders that it is time for them to take responsibility for their own nation’s future. I believe this is a reasonable, balanced approach that improves the chances for victory in Iraq,” said Edwards.

As Chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, Edwards authored \$1.8 billion in the bill to improve VA health care for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, \$1.7 billion for military construction, and \$3.1 billion to fully fund the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, which means better barracks, housing and training facilities when troops return from combat.

“As someone who has represented over 40,000 Army soldiers who have served in Iraq, it was important to include needed funding in this bill that makes a commitment to improved health care, housing and facilities for our soldiers and veterans,” said Edwards.

As recommended by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group headed by former President Bush’s Secretary of State Jim Baker, Edwards supported provisions in the bill to refocus the U.S. combat mission in Iraq to prioritize fighting terrorism, training of Iraqi security forces, and protection of coalition troops. To accomplish this, the bill establishes a “goal” of transitioning approximately half of the U.S. forces currently in Iraq to the new mission by March 2008. Fewer than half of the more than 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq today are combat forces.

“I supported changing the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq by March 2008 from combat to training Iraqi forces and fighting terrorists, which reflects the bipartisan recommendation of the Iraq Study Group. The bottom line is that I want our troops fighting Al Qaida and terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq, not serving as targets in Baghdad for Sunni and Shiite Muslims fighting each other in a religious civil war. Americans have sacrificed over 3,200 of our sons and daughters and over \$400 billion dollars in hard-earned taxes to help the

Iraqis in a war that has lasted longer than America's involvement in World War II, but ultimate success will come only when the Iraqi government understands it has to lead the fight for political, economic and military security for its nation's future," said Edwards.

In February, Edwards led the effort to include a waiver in the final bill to allow the president the flexibility to manage the war and troop rotations. Last week, Secretary of Defense Gates reiterated in his trip to Iraq that the Congressional debate was helpful in pressuring the Iraqi government to take more responsibility for security and delivered the message to the Iraqi government that the "clock is ticking" on U.S. combat operations in Iraq.

"This bill gives the president the flexibility he requested to manage troop rotations, and fully funds the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, including the president's troop surge in Iraq. It also refocuses our mission in Iraq in 2008 to fighting terrorists, training Iraqi security forces and increasing efforts to fight the resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaida in Afghanistan," said Edwards.

The bill passed the House 218 to 208 with two members voting present. The Senate is expected to pass the bill Thursday and send it to the president.

**The measure provides \$2.1 billion more for military health care than the President requested, including:**

- \$900 million for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury care and research
- \$661 million to prevent health care fee increases for our troops
- \$20 million to address the problems at Walter Reed

**The measure provides \$1.8 billion more for veterans' health care than the President requested, including:**

- \$595 million to address the backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities
- \$250 million to hire additional personnel for the administration of the VA health care system
- \$229 million for treating the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans
- \$100 million for mental health care for veterans
- \$83 million to speed up the processing of claims of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan

**Other specifics:**

- Pentagon has confirmed Congressional Research Service report saying "The Pentagon says it has enough money to pay for the Iraq war through June, despite warnings from the White House that troops are being harmed by Congress' failure to quickly deliver more funds." [AP, 4/19/07]

*Edwards is co-chair of the House Army Caucus and Chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.*